

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SANAA 000905

SIPDIS

PLEASE PASS TO MCC FOR A. BAYLOR

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/04/2015

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ELAB](#) [ECON](#) [KMPI](#) [KMCA](#) [YM](#) [ECON](#) [COM](#)

SUBJECT: YEMEMI DOCTORS STRIKE, ACCUSE ROYG OF DOING HARM

Classified By: Ambassador Thomas C. Krajeski for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) Summary. Yemeni doctors recently suspended a strike against the ROYG. In a rare nation-wide organized strike in modern Yemeni history, the physicians demanded higher wages and a return of seized assets. None of the issues have been resolved, and it appears likely the doctors will strike again in the near future. The ROYG used all available means to undermine the autonomy of the Yemen Physicians and Pharmacists Syndicate, according to Syndicate leader Dr. al-Shamiri, a ploy the ruling GPC party has used to influence and control other professional organizations. End summary.

Doctors Strike, the First of Its Kind

2. (U) On March 30, pol/econoff met with Dr. Abdul Qaui al-Shamiri, General Secretary of the Yemen Physicians and Pharmacists Syndicate. The Syndicate recently suspended its general strike, which had lasted from February 12 to March 8. The decision to suspend came after a ROYG commitment to offer new salary packages to doctors. The doctor's strike was the first national work stoppage since unification in 1990, affecting all medical services except emergency care. If their demands are not met, the syndicate has promised to resume the strike on July 1, and many doctors are demanding even more immediate action. The professional organization's main demand is for higher pay and return of its assets that were seized by the government.

3. (U) Shamiri said that doctors in Yemeni public hospitals are among the lowest paid civil servants, with salaries equivalent to those of janitors. The highest possible salary for an experienced medical doctor is approximately USD 130 per month, and a typical entry level doctor's salary is half that. Doctors are treated as regular civil servants under the payroll law, and are seeking compensation for the risks and personal investment associated with their profession.

"The Government's Under General Anesthesia"

4. (U) The strike came amidst continued conflict between the Syndicate and the ROYG. By its own charter, the Syndicate is required to hold elections every four years, but has faced repeated roadblocks from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor. In March 2004, the ROYG ran false television spots claiming that the Sanaa regional elections for the syndicate had been cancelled, and sent security guards to block voters on the day of elections. According to Shamiri, the doctors held their ground and elected delegates despite the difficulties.

5. (U) The Ministry responded by dissolving the syndicate and forming its own rival organization, to which it appointed a GPC loyalist as chairman. The ROYG did so even though the elected chairman at the time, Dr. Yahya al-Huraibi, was also a GPC member. Shamiri charged that after closing the legitimate syndicate, the ROYG then seized the organization's properties and bank accounts -- held at a government-owned bank. According to Sanaa MD Sawsan al-Refai, most of the syndicate's members remained unified and the ongoing conflict with the ROYG only deepened their determination to achieve their demands. The syndicate attempted to negotiate with the Cabinet, Prime Minister, the Minister of Health, and eventually even President Saleh, said Shamari, but the ROYG would only deal with the new ROYG-formed syndicate. The same was true for members of Parliament. Shamari said the organization warned of a strike, but "the government was under general anesthesia."

Zero Tolerance for Strikers

6. (C) When the doctors (along with many nurses and technicians) walked off the job, recounted Shamari, the ROYG used all means at its disposal to intimidate doctors back to work. Many doctors had their jobs threatened, and electricity and water to their homes cut off. In Dhammar, several doctors were locked in closets for twelve hours by

government security guards, according to Shamari. In Saada, the Governor threatened to label the strikers as supporters of the al-Houthi rebellion, putting their safety at risk.

17. (C) Prime Minister AbdulKader Bajammal engaged the syndicate in negotiations several weeks into the strike, offering to form his own committee to deal with syndicates. The doctors repounded that he could not have it both ways, saying: "If a prime minister can sit on a labor committee, then the doctors should be in the cabinet." According to another Sanaa doctor, Huraibi suspended the strike against the will of a majority of syndicate members, to give the ROYG time to respond and offer breathing room to beleaguered doctors.

18. (U) Shamari said that as part of the deal, negotiators for the Ministry of Social Affairs promised (verbally) to return fired strikers to their positions and halt the offensive against the Syndicate. Instead, they have used the interlude to remove disloyal hospital managers, such as the head of the Yemen-Kuwait Hospital. Such actions have further antagonized doctors and increased the likelihood of a renewed work stoppage. The ROYG has promised to include doctors in upcoming civil service reform, but Shamari called this politicking. Physicians do not care how their salaries are raised, he said, only that their wages are comparable to those in Ethiopia and Eritrea.

Doctors Becoming Political Activists

19. (C) As a result of their struggle with the ROYG, Syndicate leadership has become more politically sophisticated. They coordinate regularly with other autonomous professional syndicates, meeting in secret to avoid trouble with the government. Shamari shared that such activism is new to Yemen and it remains difficult to unify civil society for specific objectives. He said he would welcome international support and training, which would help build the syndicates' capacity and provide political cover from the ROYG. (Note: The Medical Syndicate submitted a proposal to NDI's Democracy Development Center to help train its leadership in civil action. End note).

110. (C) Comment: The medical syndicate's problems are but the latest episode in the ROYG's habitual interference in professional organizations. The doctors' strike coincided with another strike by university professors voicing similar demands. This follows earlier (successful) attempts by the ROYG to block internal elections in the engineers syndicate, and ongoing meddling with the lawyers and journalists syndicates. When the ROYG cannot ensure the election of its preferred candidates, it forms a shadow organization and simply appoints them. Such actions undermine the government's official positions on democracy and civil society. In reality, the ROYG will tamper with the smallest election to ensure a satisfactory outcome to the GPC, and fears dissent on such issues as the economy and corruption from Yemen's educated professionals.

Krajeski